DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 113 CG 020 156

TITLE Critical Issues in Higher Education. (Opportunities for Our Profession and a Request for Your Involvement.)
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 7p.; Discussion paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American College Personnel Association/National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (Chicago, IL, March 15-18, 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; College Students; *Educational Change; *Educational Trends; *Higher Education; *Student Personnel Services; *Student Personnel Workers
IDENTIFIERS *American College Personnel Association

ABSTRACT

A variety of issues, challenges, and criticisms of higher education has emerged in recent years, and some salient themes are briefly introduced in this paper as discussion points for conference attendees. These issues concern a return to excellence, financial demands, a decline in the traditional college age cohort, changing enrollment profiles, substance abuse, campus violence, recruitment and retention, low faculty morale, concern about faculty effectiveness, redirection in independence among faculty, a common core of learning, call for demonstration of intellectual growth of college students, the fact that institutions are held responsible to specialized accrediting agencies, and criticism of narrow programs with lessened opportunity for faculty and administrators. These issues should be characterized as challenges to higher education, not as problems. An analysis of these challenges indicates that solutions are within the domain of student affairs. Enrollment configuration, recruitment and retention, substance abuse, wellness, student employment and financial aid, assessment, teaching and learning styles, and assessing student characteristics are emphasized in student affairs. Three levels of challenge transformation are relevant for student affairs personnel: (1) whether personnel have necessary skills individually to assist with these challenges; (2) whether the student affairs division has the combination of skills needed and can mobilize these skills; and (3) whether the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) can provide assistance and leadership in this area. The weakness of ACPA may be its tendency to emphasize specialization when consideration of larger issues is needed. (Information on the meeting of which this paper is an outcome is appended.) (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

(Opportunities for our Profession and a Request for Your Involvement)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Laurine E. Fitzgerald
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED285113

This paper is one outcome of a Symposium of the ACPA Senior Scholars with representatives of other professional higher education associations. Background information about the meeting is presented on the last page of this report. The Symposium participants are providing this summary statement in the Registration packet in advance of the "Round Table" discussion scheduled for MONDAY, MARCH 16 AT 4:00 P.M. IN THE HYATT REGENCY, BALLROOM C

The Senior Scholars and other guests will initiate the discussion of issues briefly introduced within these pages. We believe that both the issues and the process of addressing these issues is fundamental to our professional development, to the enhancement of the Association and profession. These challenges provide opportunities, and options. We hope that you will actively participate in our discussions.

Laurine E. Fitzgerald, Chr. THE ACPA SENIOR SCHOLARS

CG020156

Challenges and Issues Within Higher Education

A variety of issues, challenges and criticisms of higher education have emerged in recent years. Indeed, 1985 and 1986 can be characterized as the biennium of "calls for reform" across the nation. Agendas of professional meetings, the series of national reports on higher education, legislation and threats of legislation, and informal discussions with colleagues confirm the genuine interest in and concern about the many issues and emerging problems.

Enumeration of common themes includes:

1. While the 1960s and 1970s were decades during which equity of access was stressed, the dominant theme of the 1980s is a return to quality and excellence.

2. With the economic downturn in many states, and increased scrutiny of allocations to education by state legislatures, problems related to budget reduction, retrenchment and financial exigency have become increasingly compelling as the focus for educational leadership.

3. A review of the population configuration reveals a decline in the traditional college-age cohort, and projections for high school graduates' smaller entering classes exacerbate fiscal difficulties confronting many institutions.

4. The enrollment profile continues to change with more older and married students, females, and proportionately fewer ethnic minority and traditional students.

5. Although ethnic minority populations are growing in the total population, their participation in higher education is not increasing.

6. Drug and alcohol abuse by athletes in particular, and students in general has captured national attention.

7. On many campuses, feelings of personal safety and welfare appear to be threatened by increasing incidents of interpersonal violence and aggressiveness.

8. In many regions, higher unemployment and the threat of decreasing support for federal financial aid threatens pursuit of higher education by many. Maintaining current levels of student enrollment through active recruitment appears to be matched in intensity by the attention being given to student retention activities.

9. Faculty morale is low in many institutions, with teaching personnel being described as "at risk" or "deeply troubled".

10. Faculty effectiveness in the classroom, when confronted by a wide variety of learning styles and readiness among class members is an area of increasing concern from both a human development and student retention perspective.

11. There has been a dramatic redirection in power, and independence among the faculty; "Academic Freedom", by contemporary interpretation and practice has resulted in power and independence flowing from central administration/trustees, to the faculty...for curriculum, administration and external relations policies.

12. A common core of learning and common freshman experience is being pursued by many institutions in response to public demands for evidence of quality and substance in the higher education experience.

13. A call by our citizenry for institutions to demonstrate, objectively, the intellectual growth and development of colleges students is leading to a greater emphasis and redefinition of assessment.

14. All institutions, and many disciplines of higher education are held responsible to increasingly diverse and specialized external bodies and accrediting agencies.

15. Criticism leveled against extremely narrowed graduate and professional programs in academic disciplines is coupled with the obscure career pathways and lessened mobility and opportunity for faculty and administrative non-researchers.

The foregoing is not an exhausive listing, but does reflect some of the topics receiving sustained attention.

Our setting, higher education, has not only come under scrutiny by consumers, participants and legislators, but chroniclers as well. The profile of faculty members, academic administrators, and student personnel administrator-managers reveals that the majority tend to be products of educational institutions of the 1950s and 1960s...of some "troubled" years, but years of tradition and stability undergoing change. Diversity within academe is commonplace, and with it came the dramatic shifts of locus of power, purpose and organization. We must recognize and accept the advantages of diverse points of view from the representative components of the higher education enterprise: research, administration, academic instruction, and student development.

The question becomes one of discovering what these issues and themes have to do with us as individuals, as staff members and directors in divisions of student affairs, and as faculty and staff in our respective institutions of higher education.

OPPORTUNITIES

Those challenges to higher education listed previously are often characterized within a "problem" frame of reference. A more action-oriented descriptor is "challenge." Still other action-oriented descriptors are "opportunity," and "options." A careful analysis of challenges to higher education reveals that now, probably more than ever before, solutions or interventions in response to the challenges are within the functional domain of the student affairs profession. For example, those issues that deal with student recruitment are surely related to what we know about student/environmental matches and mismatches. Issues related to retention are interconnected with concepts of student development. Enrollment configurations which address changes in gender,

age, ethnic and career direction variables elicit from us responses based on a collective body of knowledge, as well as our individual training. Other issues dealing with substance abuse, health and wellness, student employment and financial aid, assessment, compatibility of teaching and learning styles, and assessing student characteristics have been topics of conversation, a focus of research, and an emphasis in our programs.

The notion that a challenge can be transformed into opportunity is based on the assumption that the skills, knowledge, information, and resources are available. At least three levels of challenge/opportunity transformation seem relevant.

The first of these levels is the personal. Specifically, do I possess a body of knowledge, a repertoire of skills, the personal confidence, and a composite of expertise prerequisite to permit me to offer assistance to my dean, division director, president, or faculty colleagues as they grapple with these challenges?

The second level within which opportunities exist is that of the institutional agency or division, the employment setting. What does the counseling center or the dean of students office staff have to offer in the quest for solutions and interventions the institution is seeking? Does the division of student affairs have the capacity to combine the skills, knowledge, and resources of staff members in the various agencies comprising the division to address problems of retention, substance abuse, teaching style, and learning compatibility? This opportunity level differs from the personal in that the collective resources of agencies or of the entire division of student affairs can be mobilized to assist our institutions with the aforementioned challenges. The crucial question, of course, is are we prepared and can we mobilize that preparation?

The third opportunity level appears to be that of our professional association,

ACPA. To what extend does ACPA provide us with the exposure to and interaction with groups of chief executive officers. How can ACPA provide expanded interactions with faculty governance groups? Are we assured that our annual conventions have a focus on the fundamental issues, not just upon student development and student affairs, but of our institutions? Is there an appropriate balance within ACPA that has us looking inward through the Commission structure to develop unique expertise, while at the same time looking collectively outward at what we should be doing to contribute to instititutional and national problems? And, how does the Association impact our graduate preparation programs?

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Most national organizations gain strength, and take pride in the practice of involvement at the grass roots level, providing access and emphasizing specific and specialized dimensions of the profession. This may also be a critical weakness. Has our attention been directed <u>from</u> deep and thoughtful consideration of larger issues facing higher education and student personnel?

NOTES

BACKGROUND

In November of 1986, ACPA President Charles C. Schroeder convened a special Senior Scholars Symposium at Estes Park, Colorado. Six Senior Scholars, the American Associate of Higher Education President, the President of the Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Editor of the Journal of Higher Education, and the President and President-Elect of ACPA comprised the group of 11 participants. Three days were given to focused consideration of the relationships between critical issues confronting institutitions of higher education, and the necessity of new leadership direction and roles for student personnel professionals and associations within the post-secondary enterprise.

Prior to the Symposium 18 papers, articles, and reports from a variety of sources were distributed to the participants as background data for discussion. At the intitial meeting of the group, Charles Schroeder urged participants to be mindful of the myriad opportunities to move student personnel professionals to access participatory roles to assist their educational institution in successfully confronting and solving existing issues and problems. An underlying theme of leadership and organizational direction for professional associations was stressed throughout the discussions.

From this 1987 Convention "Round Table" discussion will come the identification of topics for "white paper" reports directed to specific opportunities and options available to our members in the various dimensions of their employment.

Reviewers and contributors to this document:

Senior Scholars: Margaret J. Barr, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Texas Christian University; Robert D. Brown, Professor of Education, University of Nebraska and Editor, JCSP: David DeCoster, Vice President for Student Affairs, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Ursula Delworth, Professor, Counseling Psychology, University of Iowa; #Senior Scholar Chair, Laurine E. Fitzgerald, Professor, Educational Policy and Leadership, The Ohio State University; James C. Hurst, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Wyoming; Clyde A. Parker, Psychologist, McKay Dee Hospital, Ogden, Utah.

Additional Participants: Russell Edgerton, President, American Association of Higher Education; Allan W. Ostar, President, American Association of State Colleges and Universities; Robert Silverman, Editor, Journal of Higher Education: President-Elect of ACPA Marvalene S. Hughes, Associate Vice President of Student Affairs, Arizona State University; and ACPA President Charles C. Schroeder, Vice President of Student Affairs, St. Louis University.

CIHE:SS

author of document